

News Release



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Commissioning of USS Virginia (SSN 774) ushers in a new era in undersea warfare

By Chief Journalist Mark O. Piggott, COMNAVSUBFOR Public Affairs
NORFOLK, Va. — The first nuclear-powered Virginia class fast attack submarine, USS Virginia (SSN 774), was commissioned Saturday, October 23, at Norfolk Naval Station, here.

Commander, Naval Submarine Forces, Vice Admiral Charles L. Munns, gave the order to commission the ship.

"Captain Kern, you and your men have much to be proud of, but also more work to do," Munns said. "You must steer Virginia around this dangerous and uncertain world. Guard her stealth, use her endurance, harvest her sensors, and make ready her firepower. I expect you to dominate any assignment from open ocean to the contested littorals."

The Virginia is the ninth U.S. naval vessel to be named for the "Old Dominion."

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The Virginia class submarine is the Navy's first delivered major combatant designed with the post-Cold War security environment in mind and embodies the war fighting and operational capabilities required to dominate the littorals while maintaining undersea dominance in the open ocean.

Virginia Governor Mark Warner is proud to have the lead ship of the class named for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

"Virginia's support of the United States Navy goes back to the founding of our country when the first USS Virginia was commissioned in 1777," Gov. Warner said. "Virginia values its long-standing relationship with the Navy and is proud so many vessels call the Commonwealth home."

"With new tools like the USS Virginia and other Virginia class fast attack submarines, this nation will continue to have the best equipped and best trained military in the world," he concluded.

Under an innovative agreement, General Dynamics Electric Boat is producing the Virginia class submarines as part of a team effort with Northrop Grumman Newport News. Virginia has improved stealth, sophisticated surveillance capabilities and special warfare enhancements that enable it to meet the Navy's multi-mission requirements. With a modular design, the Virginia class will be able to accommodate technology upgrades throughout the life of the class.

Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Vern Clark, said the submarine, and the men who sail on her, will take the battle to the enemy with stealth, endurance and agility.

"We need this submarine and its capabilities at sea," Adm. Clark said. "Virginia is designed to take care of and defeat the enemies of the 21st Century."

"She will bring her greatest capability, her stealth, into the warfighting calculus, in a way that will tremendously complicate life for our future and potential enemies and greatly enhance our own warfighting capabilities."

Virginia is 377 feet in length, has a waterline beam of 34 feet, a navigational draft of 32 feet, displaces approximately 7,800 tons submerged, can dive to depths greater than 800 feet, and can sustain speeds of more than 25 knots when submerged.

According to Virginia's Commanding Officer, Captain David C. Kern, his proudest moment was a foggy day in Groton, Conn., when he first took Virginia to sea.

"The fog was thick as I stood on the sail of Virginia, returning from our first underway," Kern explained. "Her engines pulsing with power, her crew having operated the boat for the first time. On that day, I was filled with pride for the accomplishments of this crew."

"We had taken to sea the world's most complex and innovative submarine, delivered within months of a date set nearly ten years earlier," he added, "initiating the most successful set of sea trials ever accomplished by the lead ship of a submarine class."

Virginia can attack targets ashore with highly accurate Tomahawk cruise missiles and conduct covert long-term surveillance of land areas, littoral waters and other sea forces. Virginia also has superior anti-submarine and anti-ship warfare capabilities, is able to provide special forces delivery and support, and can conduct mine delivery and minefield mapping.

U.S. Senator John Warner of Virginia, the principal speaker at the commissioning ceremony, spoke of the responsibility of the men who will serve aboard USS Virginia.

"It will not be the steel and the technology that's been put together so magnificently by these two yards," Sen. Warner said. "You the crew will decide the record of history and accomplishment of this ship."

"By giving you this trust," he continued, "it shows our deep respect for the training that you have had and the capabilities you will perform magnificently."

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Virginia will be homeported in Groton, Conn. Following Virginia, Northrop Grumman Newport News and General Dynamics Electric Boat will build 10 of a projected 30 Virginia class submarines. PCU Texas (SSN 775), PCU Hawaii (SSN 776), and PCU North Carolina (SSN 777) are currently under construction and scheduled to join the fleet over the next three years.

"This nation is a leader in the world and the entire world looks to us to lead in the cause of freedom," Sen. Warner added. "We cannot ever blink, we cannot ever flinch, we cannot yield, we must remain strong and lead the world, and this ship will very definitely play a role in that war on terror."

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